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FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3926

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE 0008

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 2111

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 000242

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [KPAL](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [MOPS](#)

SUBJECT: UNSC QUALIFIED ANGER AT ERITREA

REF: USUN 175

**¶11.** (SBU) SUMMARY. On March 13 U/SYG Guehenno told the Security Council that UNMEE has completed the relocation of personnel and equipment from the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) to Asmara. Guehenno listed several incidents that he described as Eritrean attempts to "humiliate" UNMEE during the evacuation. Ambassador Wolff told members that Eritrea's indefensible humiliation of a UN mission merited their consideration of a full range of responsive measures. In contrast to members' unambiguous condemnation of Eritrea on February 21 (reftel), deliberations in this session had several members more interested in discussing the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute, with some members expressing sympathy for Eritrea's position and suggesting that the Eritrean foreign minister be invited to meet informally with the Council. The Russian presidency undertook to sound out the Eritrean PermRep about such a meeting. END SUMMARY.

DPKO: Eritrea Humiliating UN to the End

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**¶12.** (SBU) During a March 13 briefing to the Security Council, Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping (DPKO) Jean-Marie Guehenno said that UNMEE has completed the relocation of personnel and equipment from the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) to the Asmara vicinity and has closed all 32 UN posts and Team Sites in the TSZ. He said 1,260 UNMEE military personnel have been relocated with 702 of them returned to their home countries. He said a small number of peacekeepers would remain in Eritrea to secure \$18 million in UN/TCC-owned equipment and facilitate its shipment, which will be completed by mid-May.

**¶13.** (SBU) Guehenno reported a number of incidents in which Eritrean Defense Forces (ENDF) attempted to obstruct or hinder UNMEE during the evacuation process (reftel). In one incident, Guehenno reported that 17 Indian Battalion vehicles heading to Camp Dunn to assist with the evacuation were stranded at an Eritrean controlled checkpoint for three days.

In another incident on February 27, Guehenno said two UN military observers were detained and interrogated by ENDF officials for over seven hours. Guehenno complained that UNMEE officials had made numerous attempts to coordinate with ENDF, so that UNMEE could depart in a more "orderly and dignified" manner but had not received substantive responses from ENDF on key coordination issues. He reported that \$2 million in equipment left on the posts and team sites were quickly seized by local residents upon UNMEE's departure

after local officials in each area refused to take responsibility for it.

UNSC Displeased with Eritrea -- to a Point

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¶ 14. (SBU) Unlike the consensus condemnation of Eritrea during the February 21 UNSC session at the height of the fuel crisis (reftel), some members had more nuanced comments on March 13, with several in outright sympathy with Eritrea's motives if not its tactics. South African PermRep Kumalo said that the Eritrea's decision to cutoff fuel supplies to UNMEE and the subsequent events related to the evacuation of the peacekeepers reflected a "complete breakdown of communication" between the host country and the Secretariat. Calling the Secretary-General's special report "one-sided," he suggested the Council invite the Eritrean foreign minister to New York to present another view. (NOTE: The South African political coordinator told poloff during the session that the Eritrean PermRep had approached Kumalo about such a meeting. END NOTE.) Libyan PermRep Ettalhi concurred and argued that an informal meeting with the Eritrean PermRep, such as the forum recently afforded the Chadian FM, could help the Council better understand what had happened and consider even now what could be done about it.

¶ 15. (SBU) UK Deputy PermRep Pierce saw the fuel crisis as reflecting an Eritrean effort "to establish the EEBC (Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission) border as a reality." She added that, "We need to sort out the border, but we need to keep that separate from the relocation crisis." Italian PermRep Spatafora lamented that, "The Council has lacked an overarching political strategy; we can't expect Eritrea to cooperate without getting something for itself." Panamanian PermRep Arrias said, "We need to give a message that we are going to address the border issue. We need to schedule

USUN NEW Y 00000242 002 OF 002

meetings on both issues (UNMEE's demise and the border) and invite in Eritrea. Any effort to condemn Eritrea without first trying to engage Eritrea could backfire."

¶ 16. (SBU) Ambassador Wolff said the UN Secretariat had documented numerous, unreciprocated efforts by the UN to communicate with the Eritrean government to head off the fuel crisis. He said the Council should assume a share of the blame for not actively intervening earlier but added that "it is too late to talk to ministers now with UNMEE completing its relocation." Wolff urged the Council to consider "the full range of measures that could be taken against Eritrea" for its humiliation of a Security Council mission, adding that a failure to do so would set an unfortunate precedent for other unhelpful actions by host countries elsewhere and would chill potential troop contributors. France, UK, Italy, Croatia, Costa Rica and Belgium agreed that a strong Council statement should be considered once the relocation is complete.

¶ 17. (SBU) At the close of the session, delegations agreed that the Russian presidency would approach the Eritrean Permanent Mission about his foreign minister's interest in a Council appearance and report back to the Council. Russian PermRep Churkin subsequently reported that the Eritrean PermRep had taken note of Churkin's probe and undertaken to refer it to Asmara.

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